

## Message Text

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PAGE 01 TUNIS 00001 010739Z  
ACTION NEA-11

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1667

UNCLAS SECTION1 OF 2 TUNIS 4696

E.O. 11652: N/A  
TAGS: ETRD, ELAB, TS, SOCI  
SUBJ: TUNISIAN LABOR STANDARDS

REF: (A) STATE 136706, (B) TUNIS A-021

1. TWO MAJOR EXPORT PRODUCTS ARE PHOSPHATES AND OLIVE OIL, TUNISIAN TEXTILES AND CLOTHING, FISH, CITRUS FRUITS, AND HANDICRAFTS ARE ALSO MARKETING ABROAD IN SIGNIFICANT QUANTITY. TWO OTHER IMPORTANT FOREIGN CURRENCY GENERATORS ARE TOURIST SERVICES AND REMITTANCES FROM EXPATRIATE TUNISIAN WORKERS. EMBASSY CONSIDERS LABOR STANDARDS APPLIED TO EXPORT PRODUCTS EQUAL, AND IN CERTAIN ASPECTS SUPERIOR, TO THOSE APPLIED TO PRODUCTION FOR LOCAL MARKETS. IN EFFECT, IF ANY DIFFERENTIAL EXISTS IT WOULD TEND TO FAVOR WORKERS IN EXPORT SECTOR: THOSE WAGES AND WORKING CONDITIONS ARE EQUAL TO OR SLIGHTLY HIGHER THAN THE NATIONAL AVERAGE FOR AGRICULTURAL AND MANUFACTURING ACTIVITIES. A CONCENTRATION OF FOREIGN OWNERSHIP IN SECOND-TIER EXPORT INDUSTRIES TENDS GENERALLY TO ELEVATE THE STANDARDS OF TRAINING, WORKPLACE SAFETY AND HYGIENE, AND RATIONAL MANAGEMENT PRACTICES.

2. MARKETING OF THE TWO MAJOR EXPORTS--PHOSPHATES AND OLIVE OIL--REMAINS UNDER TUNISIAN GOVERNMENT CONTROL. LABOR STANDARDS IN THE MINES ARE NOT EXEMPLARY AND HAVE BEEN AN ANCILLARY CAUSE OF SOME LABOR UNREST. HOWEVER  
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THEY COMPARE QUITE FAVORABLY ON A "THIRD-WORLD" SCALE; THE MINES LAG AMERICAN TECHNOLOGY BY SEVERAL DECADES (SEE REF A B). OLIVE OIL AND DERIVATIVES ARE PRODUCED LARGELY BY AGRICULTURAL LABOR UNDIFFERENTIATED AS TO PAY LEVELS OR WORKING CONDITIONS: NEITHER BETTER NOR WORSE.

3. RESPONDING DIRECTLY TO REFTEL (A), PARA 3: TUNISIA

RECENTLY HAS INSTITUTED A NATIONAL WORK CORPS PROGRAM FOR UNEMPLOYED YOUTH. WHILE ITS COMPULSORY LABOR FEATURES HAVE PLUNGED THIS SCHEME INTO CONTROVERSY, IT BEARS NO RELATIONSHIP TO EXPORT OR IMPORT-SUBSTITUTE PRODUCTION: ALL ACTUAL OR PLANNED PROJECTS ARE IN THE REALM OF PUBLIC WORKS...REFORESTATION, FLOOD CONTROL, RIGHT-OF-WAY IMPROVEMENTS. NO OTHER FORM OF INDENTURED OR FORCED LABOR EXISTS IN TUNISIA. THE EMPLOYMENT OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN IS GOVERNED BY THE BASIC LABOR CODE (LAW 66-2, APRIL 30, 1966) AND BY THE MASTER COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT OF JUNE 1, 1973 BETWEEN THE EMPLOYERS' FEDERATION (UTICA) AND THE GENERAL LABOR UNION (UGTT). WE BELIEVE THAT ENFORCEMENT IS EFFICIENT ON THE WHOLE. THE LAW AND THE AGREEMENT GENERALLY PROHIBIT THE EMPLOYMENT OF CHILDREN UNDER QTN PROHIBIT NIGHT-SHIFT WORK TO BOTH WOMEN AND CHILDREN, AND PROHIBIT PAY SCALES LOWER THAN THOSE OF MALE WORKERS.

4. MANY FIRMS HERE, ESPECIALLY IN ASSEMBLY OPERATIONS, PREFER AN ALL-FEMALE WORKFORCE EFFICIENCY IS CONSIDERED EQUAL OR HIGHER THAN THAT OF A MIXED OR MALE WORKFORCE, WHILE THE INCIDENCE OF POLITICAL AGITATION, ABSENTEEISM... AND AGGREGATE WAGE LEVELS...ARE LOWER. IN THE CONTEXT OF THE ARAB WORLD THE TUNISIAN WOMAN HAS ACHIEVED EMANCIPATION AND A LEVEL OF PERSONAL FREEDOM ENVIED BY ANY OF HER SISTERS. CHILD LABOR, SUCH AS IT MAY EXIST IN TUNISIA, APPEARS TO BE MORE AN EXPRESSION OF THE AGRICULTURAL OR UNCLASSIFIED

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NOMADIC LIFE STYLE RATHER THAN ANY TOKEN OF INDUSTRIAL EXPLOITATION.

5. TUNISIA IS NOT CHARACTERIZED BY EXCEPTIONALLY HIGH RATES OF INDUSTRIAL ACCIDENTS OR DISEASE. EMBASSY ECONOMIC/COMMERCIAL SECTION HAS SURVEYED INFORMALLY A WIDE RANGE OF MANUFACTURING AND PROCESS FACILITIES IN TUNISIA. WHILE MANY EMPLOYEES DEPRECIATED EUROPEAN OR AMERICAN MACHINERY AND USE TECHNOLOGY OBSOLETE BY WESTERN STANDARDS, THE GENERAL LEVEL OF HEALTH AND SAFETY PRACTICES IS ACCEPTABLE, AND MAY RANGE UPWARD TO EXCELLENT--ALWAYS EXCEPTING THE OCCASIONAL ROGUE OPERATION.

6. THE LAW AND THE COLLECTIVE AGREEMENTS REQUIRE THE PRESENCE OF A NURSE AT ANY PLANT EMPLOYING MORE THAN FORTY WORKERS; MOST LARGER FACILITIES PROVIDE REGULAR VISITS BY A DOCTOR AS WELL. PLANTS EMPLOYING OF 300 WORKERS MUST OPERATE A FULLTIME MEDICAL UNIT. PARTICULAR CONDITIONS IN EACH INDUSTRY ARE GOVERNED BY THE COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT APPLICABLE TO THAT SECTOR. (MOST OF THESE AGREEMENTS WERE CONCLUDED IN AUGUST 1975 AND REMAIN SUBSTANTIALLY IN EFFECT. EACH IS SUBORDINATE TO THE

MASTER AGREEMENT OF 1973 WHICH SERVES, IN EFFECT, AS THE ENFORCEMENT ARM OF THE LABOR CODE.) THE TUNISIAN LABOR CODE, AS WELL AS THE SAMPLE OF INDUSTRY COLLECTIVE CONTRACTS AVAILABLE TO US, STAND SILENT ON THE QUESTION OF TOXIC EXPOSURE. WE HAVE NO STATISTICAL BASE ON THE INCIDENCE OF BROWN LUNG OR SILICOSIS, DISEASES OFTEN ASSOCIATED WITH THE PRODUCTION OF MAJOR TUNISIAN EXPORTS: TEXTILES AND PHOSPHATE ORES. THESE MALADIES HAVE NOT SURFACED AS MATTERS OF OFFICIAL OR POPULAR CONCERN. BOTH THE LABOR CODE AND THE COLLECTIVE AGREEMENTS REQUIRE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF JOINT MANAGEMENT/UNION WORKS SAFETY COMMITTEES TO DEAL WITH INDUSTRIAL HAZARDS PECULIAR TO THEIR SECTOR. MANAGE-

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## Message Attributes

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